

Free help for expecting and new mums at risk of depression

July 30 2014, by Sandra Hutchinson

With postnatal depression affecting almost one in seven women giving birth in Australia, QUT and the White Cloud Foundation have launched an innovative model of care to provide early access to treatment for expecting and new mothers at risk of depression.

QUT's Faculty of Health Executive Dean Professor Ross Young said the pilot project, to be run through QUT Health Clinics, would for the first time provide women at risk of pre and post natal [depression](#), with access to a free "collaborative" clinic.

"What is unique about this health service is it provides women with treatment from five healthcare professionals, who are all experts in the care of depression, at the one site, in a co-ordinated manner," Professor Young said.

"Women will receive treatment from a psychologist, social worker, nurse, exercise physiologist and dietitian.

"We all know that there is usually more than one thing that can be done to help depression, but current methods can place significant demands on the patient to manage the input of multiple professionals themselves."

Professor Young said the Expecting and New Mothers Clinic was designed for women who recognised they were currently entering a challenging phase in their life and required effective strategies to avoid progressing further or into depression.

He said depression and anxiety were common, but women were more at risk of experiencing episodes of "low mood" with the arrival of a new baby.

"Pregnancy and adjusting to a new baby is rewarding but it can also be very challenging and overwhelming as women cope with the significant changes to their lives," he said.

"We often hear of [postnatal depression](#) but it is important to recognise depression can set in prior to birth.

"It is difficult to take the first step but early support is critical for the prevention of pre and post natal depression."

The free clinic is suitable for expecting and new mothers who may be experiencing any of the following issues for more than two weeks: lack of support; loss of energy, tiredness and fatigue; low levels of social support or loneliness; feeling overwhelmed; anxiety or sadness. The clinic is also suitable for those with a history of pre and post natal depression or trauma during pregnancy or post birth.

Professor Young said women would be offered an initial consultation and provided with a tailored treatment plan recommending strategies to help them cope day-to-day, and deal with the early stages of depression.

"This will be followed by two review sessions where health professionals will monitor the person's progress and refer them to one-on-one appointments if necessary," he said.

"Women unable to attend the Kelvin Grove clinic are able to access virtual sessions via Skype."

Professor Adam Scott, Founder and Chairman of White Cloud

Foundation sees this model as a way forward for dealing with the crippling rate of depression in our community.

He said the foundation planned to roll out this model of care to address other forms of depression in the community in other locations, as well as providing e-health services to remote, rural and regional Australia.

Ben Roberts-Smith, VC and White Cloud Foundation Patron, said depression was like a ticking time bomb in Australia, with around 1 million adults living with depression each year.

"Like many illnesses, depression doesn't discriminate and affects all ages, all cultures and all socio-economic classes, with significant impacts on teenagers, men and women, post-natal mothers, returning soldiers and the elderly," he said

"A stigma still exists around admitting that you have depression in our country, but it takes courage to take the first steps and this first clinic from the White Cloud Foundation and QUT is a huge step in the right direction and requires funding to keep going to help the thousands that suffer each day."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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